

WASHINGTON - Today, Congressmen Bart Stupak (D-MI), Mark Steven Kirk (R-IL), Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), and E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-FL) introduced the Save Our Waters From Sewage Act, that would fight to block the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposal to allow partially treated human sewage to be dumped into our waterways.

The bill was introduced at a press conference where several other Members of Congress representing states from coast to coast and environmental groups such as Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), American Rivers, Public Interest Research Group, National Fisheries Institute, Earth Justice, the Sierra Club and Clean Water Action discussed the health and environmental repercussions for the EPA proposal. The legislation comes one week after 135 bipartisan Members of Congress sent a letter to the EPA Acting Administrator, Stephen L. Johnson, stating their objections to this proposal.

"It wasn't long ago, the deadly waterborne illness, Cryptosporidium, was found near Milwaukee and was traced back to a sewage dumping occurrence that would be allowed under this proposal. This contamination killed over 100 people and sickened over 400,000," Stupak said. "Billions of gallons of human waste are dumped into our Great Lakes and other water resources each year. This sort of outbreak can happen again if we don't act now to prevent the EPA from rolling back our clean water standards."

Joan Rose, Water Researcher at Michigan State University, issued a report investigating the impact of sewage that shows the risk could be 100 times greater if exposed to areas impacted by partially treated sewage as opposed to fully treated wastewater. Her study tested for and found pathogenic viruses which can cause meningitis and myocarditis as well as Cryptosporidium and Giardia parasites in sewage and surface waters. The parasites cause diarrheal disease that can be serious in high risk groups, such as children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

"Congress must lead in protecting the Great Lakes, the crown jewel of the Midwest's ecosystem," said Kirk. "Dumping raw sewage into the Great Lakes is what I believe is causing our beach closings. It is the responsibility of all states and cities bordering the Great Lakes to act as good environmental stewards to our country's most precious freshwater resource. Passing this legislation will ensure Great Lakes states and cities adhere to this responsibility."

"The notion that the federal agency charged with protecting our environment would knowingly dirty our waters by allowing more sewage dumping is appalling," Pallone said. "I've worked for two decades with so many dedicated New Jerseyans to keep the Jersey shore clean. If the EPA goes ahead with its guidance to let more sewage enter our waters, all of this progress will take a giant step backwards. The legislation we introduce today would prevent EPA from taking this ill-advised action."

A November 2003 draft policy issued by the EPA stated that during rain events, publicly owned

water treatment facilities would be allowed to combine the filtered but untreated human sewage with fully treated wastewater before discharge, in a process known as “blending.” The EPA has yet to enact the policy but by doing so would effectively lift the current prohibition on bypassing a crucial second treatment step allowing more bacteria, pathogens, viruses and parasites into our waterways. The Save Our Waters From Sewage Act would block that policy.

"In America, rivers shouldn't smell like outhouses, and going fishing with dad should be the safest thing that kids can do on a summer afternoon," said Rebecca Wodder, President of American Rivers. "We are grateful to Congressmen Stupak, Kirk, Shaw, and Pallone for their leadership in introducing the Save Our Waters from Sewage Act to reaffirm the nation's commitment to making our waters safer and cleaner."

The Save Our Waters From Sewage Act will stop the EPA from turning the clock back on 30 years of water protection under the Clean Water Act. It highlights the need of investing in and upgrading our nations waste water infrastructure. As an increasingly urgent aspect of this issue, it's time Congress took action to address this problem.

"It does not require anyone to do the impossible, just to provide full treatment whenever it is feasible to do so by investing in solutions that work, such as cleaning out the sewers, reducing infiltration and inflow, upgrading capacity to provide treatment for the expanded population base, and rehabilitating and replacing aging sewer lines," said Nancy Stoner of NRDC.

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